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of which he retains the restricted territory he now occupies in the character of tributary vassal to the defeated sovereign.

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THE PEACE THAT COMETH OF UNDERSTANDING:

A DISCOURSE FOR NECESSITARIANS.

I TRUST I may find favor with our scientific friends if I begin with a large assumption. I assume that from the planets in their orbits to the street-cabs in the thoroughfares the Universe is ruled by Law, and that though "Chance," "Contingency," "Caprice," and many another word still do duty in literature, they are recognized as but a decent veil for human ignorance, and not as implying a serious belief that at any given point, even the most insignificant, Law will be found to fail. I assume, by consequence, that every thing and every person are but "retainers to the rest of Nature," and stand indissolubly related by the ligaments of Law to the Cosmos in which each fills its insignificant yet indispensable place.

This assumption made, we may go on to consider the consolation it affords, for it is to be feared that the champions of Free Will sometimes do scant justice to the necessitarian. Terrified at the very thought that Freedom may be in danger, they seem quite to forget that a doctrine of necessity, whatever tidings of bondage it may seem to carry to the Will, brings, and brings just in proportion as it is thoroughgoing, nothing but encouragement to the understanding. It tells us that our actions, like all other events, are rigorously due to causes. Be it so. Just for that reason are they capable of explanation. Just for that reason can the understanding find in human life, as it has so often found in Nature, a new world, in the conquest of which it can attain a fuller development and a deeper satisfaction. Who will say that this is a little thing? Is there in all the round of man's endowments one

that is more eminently human than this desire and capacity to know, to explain, to understand? And if Necessitarianism opens up new and splendid vistas to this, is it not rather to be regarded as a doctrine of emancipation—intellectual emancipation—than as a message of bondage? The more so if it should appear on closer examination that, in proportion as we succeed in understanding our lives, our lives themselves do not remain by any means just what they were before.

At least and lowest, the patient and engrossing study of life (our own lives or those of others) may furnish an anodyne. Biography tells us of Bastille prisoners who found in the daily observation of the very insects that infested their cells an intellectual antidote that saved them from despair. May we not learn from them? Prisoners within "that inverted bowl men call the sky," may we not touch the springs of pity, or of mirth, as the understanding eye marks the strange ongoing of "God's wondrous manikins here below"?

Anodyne, however, is not much. Far more important is the fact that by the study, as scientific as we can make it, of men's lives, and especially of our own, we can *rid ourselves of illusions*. Let us take an instance. Some one has had a cherished project. It has miscarried, and the blow is crushing. At first it is all unintelligible.

"God's intimations fail
In clearness rather than in energy,"

as Browning has it, and the man can think of nothing but his calamity, or at most of its quite immediate and obvious effects upon his life. But with time, and the calmness that time brings, comes reflection, and with reflection the perception, growing ever clearer, that, after all, the event could hardly have been otherwise. The sufferer follows up this clue. Going resolutely to work, he analyses out the conditions that have brought about the upshot,—his own share in it, the share of others, the share of circumstance, the whole complex web of conditions, so far at least as he can unravel it, till at last a multitude of conditions, of which at first he was wholly unconscious, comes into view; and he begins to see with ever

clearer vision that when he initiated his project he was acting in great ignorance and blindness. He sees *now*, as he did not see at first, that the project of which the defeat was so bitter was formed in ignorance of the actual causes, the real conditions involved. If only he had understood them sooner! If only he had been wise in time! But of course he did not; he was not; and so undertook an impossible project and had his bitter disappointment. And what *now*,—now that he has come to understand how it all came about? Is he to laugh or weep or curse the day he was born, *or* is he not rather, if he be wise, likely to be, from his very soul, thankful *that he has got rid of an illusion?*

But there are subtler illusions than this, and among them are the illusions of the passions. These are not accidental, nor can man escape them. For, in truth, they are due to his very nature. For it is of the nature of man, at least to begin with, to be pictorial in his thinking. He craves for images, and he is not to be blamed for doing so. But he pays an inevitable penalty. For it is of the very essence of the imagination that it does its best to palm off upon us some partial aspect, some fragment of life, some quite limited experience as if it were everything. It seizes on some experience and figures it in such definite form and clothes it in such vivid colors that its real importance becomes grotesquely exaggerated; until at last, paltry fraction of a paltry experience though it be, it comes to usurp the whole mind and to crush out the greater things that are worth living for or worth dying for. Here lies the very secret of the awful, or ridiculous, tyranny of the passions. They feed upon the illusions of the imagination. The false perspective of imagination distorts the true and sober view of things. It forces into a false relief this or that episode or aim or object in life, and thereby succeeds in stirring within us that tumult of soul, that torrent of desire, which could never have so much as arisen had we been able from the first to see facts as they truly are. It is thus, by the very impact upon body and mind of the changing scene of his personal life, man falls victim to illusions—illusions of ambition, love, hatred, fear, hope, despair, of all the

passions. Not one but brings its illusion. And the paradox is *that the passion is masterful just because its object is thus illusive*. Here is a man who is mastered by revenge till his most patient counsellors cease in despair to speak to him. And why? Because the image of his enemy, of his own fancied wrong, of his longed-for vengeance, so warps his imagination that he can think and dream of nothing else. Life, the apocalypse of a God, has shrunk to a poor melodramatic theatre for petty personal revenge. Here is another overmastered by despondency. And why? Because some picture of fancied misfortune to be encountered in some fancied future has so possessed his mind that it has already begun to produce the very suffering from which, spectre-ridden by anticipation, he shrinks. Here is a third carried off his feet by some hope, even when the most ordinary of onlookers can see that it is a hope doomed to disillusionment, a poor fool's paradise. And why? Once again, because the image of some longed-for end and his own fruition of it has so seized upon him that he can think of nothing else, even till the earth and the heavens have come in his distorted outlook to revolve around his liliputian expectations. And yet the remedy is so simple! If men would only *think*! If they would only think, not with the waywardness of reverie or the vagueness of desultory reflection, but with the same determination to *understand* with which they go to their lecture-rooms and laboratories!

For these passions can be understood. Have we not said (for it is the assumption upon which we are proceeding) that all things are under law, all things the products of causes, all things therefore fit matter for explanation. Human passions are no exception. We cannot escape them. They are the necessary effects of causes not of our making, not of our unmaking. By Law the stone falls, by Law the planet moves in its orbit, by Law the plant spreads out its leaves in the sunshine, and by Law—Law for which the whole compacted Cosmos is voucher—man is born, as the sparks fly upward, to illusions, and to the troubles, disquietudes, torments which illusions beget.

One thing, however, remains. From the very jaws of bond-

age he can pluck deliverance. At least he can understand, or try to understand.

And what is it to understand? It is to discover the real conditions of events—to resolve facts into their causes—to recognize the dependence of the part on the whole to which it is retainer. In simpler words, it is to see things, at least in far-off approximation, as they truly are. And by consequence it is to supersede and to explode the false, limited, and illusive views of things as they are *not*, but only seem to be,—as they seem to be to us in the days of our passionate, deeply-agitated ignorance. Apply this to the passions. Revenge, despondency, hope—we have seen the secret of their mastery over us. They lord it over us *by fraud*. They are rooted in illusion,—that kind of illusion which so fills our mind with partial, fragmentary, narrow, and often paltry aspects of things that even the most ordinary onlooker will tell us that we are “blinded by our passions” and do not see facts as they really are.

It is from this the understanding can deliver us. It turns its scrutinizing eye upon these illusory objects of the passions; it bids us consider them in their relations to the larger world of fact, at the touch of which their exclusive claims upon us crumble and seem preposterous; and it ends by relegating them to their due significance, or insignificance, as the frail finite illusions of a very finite fraction of the great real world of fact. It detects the fraud, it explodes the illusion on which the tyranny of the passions rests.

Is it to be supposed that this later view will leave us just where we were before? Can we reasonably suppose that the passion, once it is thus understood, will continue to subjugate us as in those days—days of our ignorance—before we had ever even tried to understand it? *Then*—in those days of our illusion—it and its object were the one thing that seemed to give value to life, the one thing that blotted out all else, the one thing the defeat of which made life no longer worth living. That is what it *was*. But now, in the light of open-eyed and dispassionate contemplation, what can be clearer than that we were blind to the realities of things? We had our troubled

and our stormy hour—in the days of our ignorance. Could we have had it, had we known *then* all that in the light of fuller understanding we know now—now that we begin to see that the real meaning of our frantic precipitances and bitter defeats was nothing other than that they were attempts to measure this well compacted and intelligible Universe by our own presumptuous ignorance.

Even to these bondsmen of passion themselves the rolling years bring the wiser mind which takes the larger and more understanding view of the world, which sees that so many things for which men struggle and torment themselves in vain, even to the sacrifice of body and soul, are illusive; that many possessions which they thought they could not do without were best withheld; that many a defeated hope was but a good in the process of making. Why, then, wait for years to bring this slow-footed wisdom? Why see things as they truly are only in retrospect? Why not be wise in time? Why not at least try at the outset to understand? So that thereby learning, as far as in us lies, the inexorable conditions under which we must needs live, we may neither have to embitter our days by vain regrets over what was impossible nor agitate it by illusory hopes for the unattainable.

Nor is it to be supposed that all the Understanding can do for us is summed up in this ridding us of illusions. It is a dubious boon to rid any man of an illusion till we know what we have to put in its place. And if this universe be—as the mystic tells us—unintelligible, or—as the sceptic tells us—hollow, then perhaps the Human Spirit had best be left to film the abyss with such thatchwork and patchwork of illusions as it can muster. It is, however, upon a very different assumption that we have been proceeding. We have been proceeding on the assumption—deny it who can—that law, coherence, order, intelligibility, run throughout. And this being so, no man who elects to follow where his understanding leads need ever fear that he will fail to find a supreme object which will profoundly satisfy at least some of the deepest instincts and faculties of his soul. For as the years go on there will shape itself with ever-growing clearness the vision, verifiable

at least in part, of a system of Nature (and of Human Life as a part of Nature) infinitely vast and infinitely varied, compacted in every joint by an eternal necessity, and throughout its teeming infinitude intelligible down to the uttermost detail. Some will call it Nature, some will call it God, or the Infinite, or the Absolute, or Eternal Substance. It does not so greatly matter what they *call* it. Let them fill their souls with it and call it by what name they will. Enough for us that we should strive to understand it, and to understand our own finite necessary place within it. Small wonder if at times, in presence of this soul-satisfying object, all ordinary objects of human pursuit have seemed to dwindle to insignificance, and if against this cosmic background man's fieriest passions and most tumultuous emotions have sunk into the finitude of events not worthy to ruffle the soul, far less to toss it on the waves of this so troublesome world.

This is no fancied experience. There was a thinker—surely among the greatest of the modern world—who lived it. Most ways were barred to him. For he was outcast, friendless, poor, solitary, sickly. But one way was open—the path of understanding. In that way unfalteringly and cheerfully he walked; and if there be any truth in biography, in that way he walked to victory over the world. We do not need to cast about for his secret. For he has written it in that memorable declaration: “I resolved not to laugh or to weep over the actions of men, but simply to understand them.” And of him it may be said that, thus seeking, he found, not the peace that passeth understanding, for that he had put far from him, but the peace and the fortitude which understanding can bring.

It may be worth while very briefly to anticipate a criticism upon these pages, a criticism which the spirit of the present day is quick to make. Man, it will be said, is not understanding only: he is also Heart and Will; and the Heart will not be still nor the Will satisfied, though you could offer them the Cosmos understood from end to end.

“Shatter it to bits

And then remould it nearer to the heart's desire.”

This is the language of the Heart. Let the heavens fall and the Universe disjoint, so be it that Duty be done,—this is the language of the Will. “Shatter it to bits,” it is easy to say. But where are we to begin? Are we to wish that the angles of a triangle should not be equal to two right angles, or that bodies should not attract each other inversely to the square of the distance? Such things are past wishing for, past praying for, because by intelligible necessity triangles are triangles and attraction is attraction. And if the ways of men be, albeit in more complex fashion yet similarly, the products of an intelligible necessity (and this is our assumption), well, we may not say that they are past praying for, because, as matters stand with us, they are so far from being fully understood that we may pray with all our heart that to a deeper knowledge they may prove to be less in need of shattering than we in the impatience of ignorance are prone to imagine.

Similarly with the language of the Will. On our assumption there is manifestly no room for the freedom of the Will in any ordinary sense. Freedom of independent personal initiative at any rate becomes a species of illusion. For what this fancied freedom really means is, as Spinoza pointed out, that, while we are conscious that we act, we are not conscious, say rather we are profoundly ignorant, of the causes of our actions. So that if we knew all the causes of our actions, we should see that one and all of these are rigorously necessitated even as we know the stone is necessitated to fall downwards or the spark to fly upwards. I am not saying this is true. I am not saying it is false. I am not arguing against Free Will, or for it, at all. I am taking the necessitarians on their own ground. I am granting them all they seem to ask. I am assuming that Law is everywhere and everywhen. And I am contending that, even then, a way to Life lies open,—none other than that path of understanding which Spinoza trod.

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